



King County

Ron Sims

King County Executive

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April 29, 2004

The Honorable Larry Phillips
Chair, King County Council
Room 1200
COURTHOUSE

Dear Councilmember Phillips:

Attached for your consideration and adoption is a proposed motion establishing a policy framework for King County's participation in the development of a long-term approach to locating Tent City 4 in King County. This Motion represents an effort in collaboration with the Seattle Housing and Resource Effort (SHARE) and the Women's Housing, Equality and Enhancement League (WHEEL) and faith-based and not-for-profit organizations in King County. In requesting your policy guidance and direction through this legislation, it is my assumption that a tent city on county owned property serving as the interim site would be operated under essentially the same conditions and oversight as tent city sites in the City of Seattle. I am doing this because I share the Council's desire to address homelessness in our county.

Let me briefly review the history of King County's involvement with Tent City that has led to this legislation. Last year, the County Council, through proviso, asked the County Executive to identify potential park sites for what has come to be known as Tent City 4. I vetoed that proviso because King County park properties are incompatible with use as a tent city for a multitude of operational and legal reasons, as well as a matter of general policy. As I stated in my veto message, I support the pursuit of permanent affordable housing over temporary measures such as tent cities. However, seeing the immediate need in our region, I have accepted that this alternative is preferable to life on the streets while we continue to work on longer-term solutions. In my December 11, 2003 veto letter I pledged to the Council to seek alternatives and in January I directed my staff to develop a list of non-park, county owned properties that could serve as future interim sites for a tent city.

In the midst of my effort to identify viable alternative county owned locations and prepare that information for review by the County Council, SHARE/WHEEL declared on April 5, 2004 their intent to enter a King County park on May 6, 2004, with the goal of occupying the property for purposes of a tent city, despite my expressed concerns regarding use of park



property in this fashion. I recognize that the Council will need time to deliberate and decide this difficult issue and will not likely be able to reach a decision before May 6. Therefore, to preserve the opportunity to work together with SHARE/WHEEL on a long-term strategy for locating Tent City 4, I am offering them a temporary site to occupy until the Council acts.

After reviewing many possible sites in the past two weeks, the property selected is the vacant property adjacent to the Brickyard Road Park-and-Ride located at 15530 Juanita-Woodinville Way NE in unincorporated King County. This property will be available to Tent City 4 for no more than 90 days, provided that certain terms and conditions are met. Because of the need to identify a property quickly, the properties we reviewed for the temporary site were all in unincorporated King County. There are potentially suitable sites within cities but any such sites would have required detailed negotiations that would have prevented us from meeting the May 6th deadline established by SHARE and WHEEL.

During the next 90 days, I would ask for your consideration of this motion to provide policy direction and inform our effort to craft a longer-term approach to locating Tent City 4. This would involve a broader representation of the community and would better link Tent City 4 to our ongoing efforts to address the causes of and solutions to, homelessness.

My staff has worked to develop a list of King County owned properties in both unincorporated King County and within cities that meet the suitability criteria outlined by SHARE/WHEEL while balancing the operational and service delivery needs of our many departments. This list of properties is included as an attachment to the ordinance. Efforts are still underway to inspect and identify any inherent problems with the sites on this list, and to identify any possible additional sites. We will also begin immediate discussions with any cities that contain potential future Tent City sites that are on the list. We need the cities as collaborative partners if we are to solve this problem both now and in the future.

Let me be clear that all of these locations, including the proposed temporary site, will have issues. No site has been permitted for this particular type of activity. It is highly likely that any host community will raise questions and concerns that we will need to address together. The criteria used to develop this list include county ownership, topography, and access to potable water and general proximity to transit as outlined by SHARE/WHEEL. However, as part of your deliberations regarding the policy framework, please consider additional criteria and objectives that should be included in our work to improve the long-term plan.

An emergency tent city offers a short-term solution that makes the issue of homelessness very visible, but it is only that – a short-term remedy. The transient encampment provides a community for up to 100 people, with little long-term impact on the underlying problem of homelessness. We must respond to the need for emergency shelter and transitional housing and support, as well as increase the supply of long-term affordable housing to help individuals and

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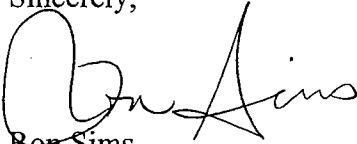
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families achieve the stability to find and keep jobs. King County is a founding partner and member of the Committee to End Homelessness and we will forward to you in the fall recommendations on long-term strategies to address homelessness. We are continuing to explore partnerships with faith communities, housing developers, and community groups to create permanent housing specifically to help low-income individuals and families. We will also investigate federal and other homeless service grants to look for ways to increase our affordable housing. I am dedicated to an ongoing effort to address homelessness in King County and to seeking viable solutions to these problems.

Please feel free to contact Kurt Triplett, Chief of Staff, (206) 296-4002 with any questions you might have.

Sincerely,



Ron Sims

King County Executive

Enclosure

cc: King County Councilmembers

ATTN: Shelley Sutton, Policy Staff Director
Rebecha Cusack, Lead Staff, BFM Committee
Anne Noris, Clerk of the Council

Kurt Triplett, Chief of Staff, Executive Office (EO)

Sheryl V. Whitney, Assistant King County Executive, EO

Steve Call, Director, Office of Management and Budget

Paul Tanaka, County Administrative Officer, Department of Executive Services

✓ Jackie MacLean, Director, Department of Community and Human Services

Dr. Alonzo Plough, Director, Public Health Seattle/King County

Pam Bissonnette, Director, Department of Natural Resources and Parks

Harold S. Taniguchi, Director, Department of Transportation

Stephanie Warden, Director, Department of Development and Environmental Services

